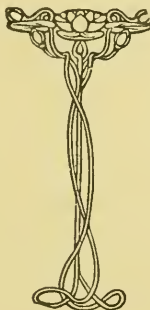


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One Night on Picket

By A. M. Prude



PRICE 13 CENTS
MAIL 15 "

One Night on Picket

BY
A. M. PRUDE
A Forest Cavalryman,

Author of
Solioquy of Birmingham Bob of Rainbow Glen; Return From War,
100,000 Men in Tears, One Night's Confederate Service,
Fifteen Days' Confederate Service or "War is Hell,"
Et. al.

DEDICATION.

This Unpretentious Booklet Is Lovingly Dedicated To The
Patriotic Braves Of Company I, 7th Ala. Cavalry
Who Fell Dead On Field Of Battle.

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PS 3531
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1917

One Night On Picket

J. A. Howell was religious at home before the war, carried his religion with him into the war, used it there, brought it back with him untarnished from the bloody strife, and at home, died with it at last, conspicuous to the world.

In Tennessee, one gloomy, cold night, darkness impenetrable, Mr. Howell and I were ordered to follow an unplain road until we came to a creek, and there remain, without relief, until break of day, and watch for the approach of the enemy in that direction.

We left the command bivouaced in a wood and began our perilous ride, well knowing the possibility and probability were that we would ride into an ambushade, and the first warning would be the fire-belching muskets of the foe flashing death-dealing missiles into our breasts.

On we slowly and cautiously went until our horses' feet splashed the water, crossing silently our dark pathway, and there, we knew, we were to shiver sleepless and hungry, wet and cold, and suffer indescribable tortures until the morning sun, obscured by the murky clouds, should mark the end of our vigil. All through the night an occasional shower of snow fell, which, under more favorable circumstances would have looked beautiful indeed.

While wending our way over the dark road to our post, our thoughts wandered to our loved ones in far-away Pickens County. Mr. Howell had a good, Christian wife and eight babies at home, dependent on his labor for support. Every time he drew his pay he immediately sent almost the entire amount to Bess and the babies, reserving only a paltry sum for himself.

Soon after reaching our post, our minds still wandering home, he remarked, "You have always said to me you did not feel that you would be killed or die in the war, but I am not so hopeful. Oh, what would I give tonight if I could see Bess and my darling little children in her lap and around her side, in our fire-bright, love garlanded home, and once more their sweet voices hear, and see her, my darling wife, the mother of my helpless and unprotected babes, as she bends upon her knees and implores the protection of the Great God of the Universe upon me and our loved ones. I want you, if I am killed tonight, and you are spared, to go to my wife and orphans and tell them I was ready and died in the arms of my Redeemer."

When ceased speaking did he, and silence profound reigned, save the champing of our horses upon their bits, the murmuring water of the runlet disputing the right of way with the pebbles in its hurry to the Tennessee, and perhaps notes discordant of an owl far away hooting, he drew his coat sleeve across his eyes, and wiped from his face neither perspiration nor the dews of night gathering there.

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As he was speaking, my mind reverted to far away home, to mother, to father and little sister, around a bright, crackling fire, who, I knew, were ever thinking of me, and to father's faithful negroes singing their old plantation songs around their log-heap fires in their warm, comfortable cabins, and I thought then, and realized indeed, and do today, that all that was saved of value to mortal man from the fall, the wreck and ruin of lost Paradise, was, and is, the sacred home, home, sweet, delectable home, summit of human felicity, for there the whizzing of angel wings and seraphic anthems are nearest heard, and when I of home's sweet environments weary and tire, revere them no more and pay them not homage due, let me, vile, base wretch undeserving, no longer inhale invigorating air.

That was a bitter cold night, winter's tempestuous howl saluted our ears all night long. I was sick, hungry, wet, sleepy, tired and chilled by winter's blasting and freezing winds. I never in all my life, suffered such terrible agonies as I did that night. We suffered the excruciating tortures of the damned in regions of despair.

I said to Mr. Howell, as we tramped and tramped around our shivering horses to keep the frost from biting our toes and fingers, "What if father, mother and two sisters, and your wife and children knew of our pitiable condition tonight. Sleep would fly into banishment, and their mental agony would be as great as our physical sufferings."

He replied, "Yes, I often think of that, and I am glad they don't know it."

After a long, pensive stillness, nothing heard but the rough wind's howl among the trembling tree tops, he again broke the silence and said: "Our cause is hopelessly lost, and just or unjust, is a question not in it now; it is lost, irretrievably lost, and it is inhuman and barbaric to require of us such sufferings and tortures as we are enduring; it is useless, nonsensical, to continue the struggle longer; we are bound to fail, right or wrong, and the end is not far away." He said, "General Lee, President Davis and all the Confederate authorities know this as well as we, and they know, every blow that General Lee deals is only a blow in vain, but it carries, sorrow, sadness, gloom, destruction and death throughout our already blood-deluged once fair Southland. They know every blow he strikes does no possible good whatever in any sense, and yet it empties forever the chair reserved around the sacred fireside of our Southern Southland dear, which can never be refilled. They know, every blow lowers the heads already adorned with whiteness, and waters afresh the grief-marked cheeks of aged and tottering mothers and sires, or widows and orphans the once happy home. They know, every blow veils more dolefully, dismally and deeply the Southern home, and drives happiness, farther and farther and farther away."

I again said, "Mr Howell, if you are killed tonight upon the bank of this little, purling stream, or die from exposure to

this weather angry now, who would, or could, fill the chair reserved for you by your loved ones, your wife tonight occupying one jamb of your fireside, your eight babies huddled together around the other, ah! who could fill in their midst your empty chair?"

He answered with a grievous, tear-starting sigh, "None," and again relapsed into silence deep, but I could tell from his sniffing that a flood of tears had again burst through their barriers and were silently cascading his well-nigh frozen cheeks.

I asked Mr. Howell how long the war would last, if General Lee, President Davis and his cabinet should have to go into the army as private soldiers and suffer as they, pushed from association of loved ones into this cold and biting frost.

His reply was, "About ten days." "No," retracting he said, "they would formulate a plan of settlement while shivering in this frost entirely satisfactory to Lincoln long before the coming sun twilights another morn, or birds bestir once again from their roosts, and their songs chirped could be once more heard, conditioned only on amnesty for themselves."

To the poor private, "War, truly is slavery, bloody stakes, coffin tops and hell."

* * * * *

One morning, years after way-cry ceased to alarm, after a long, lingering illness, realizing life was fast ebbing away, and remorseless death was eagerly watching near, he called his devoted wife and all his loved ones around his bedside, said he "wanted to see them all once more."

After feasting his eyes for the last time on their sweet faces, he, with smile on his trembling lips, turned satisfied and, resignedly away, and about noon, J. A. Howell, swept by the glittering stars enroute to the home of the Christ he so long and faithfully served.

Colonel Denson and the Moonshiner, or "What was the Matter With Hannah"

Reader, you, as I, have no doubt, often heard the question asked, "What was the matter with Hannah?"

Some would say one thing, some another; no two fully agreeing, and after long, careful meditation, and true deliberation on that all important subject, I, for many years had been fully convinced and satisfied that there were various and sundry things which beset and perplexed Hannah, but Col. W. H. Denson, while District Attorney, said there was only one thing "the matter with Hannah;" and he proved it too, to a moral certainty, to my satisfaction and to the conviction of a jury.

I was, at the time referred to, on a visit to Birmingham and the U. S. Court was in session. I had never been in a U. S. Court, never had seen Colonel Denson, a District attorney, a Federal judge, nor a moonshiner, and through curiosity I dropped into the court to see if they were conducting their investigations on scientific principles. A little in the rear, though close enough to see and hear well, I seated myself by a gentleman of rustic air, dressed in gray homespun jeans clothes, shoes worn and unpolished, hair stranger to both comb and brush, toying a hat, judging from its dilapidated and antiquated appearance must have been built in colonial days. This man I afterwards found to be a typical moonshine mountaineer wildcatter.

Just as I took my seat, Colonel Denson called a case, "Government vs. Hannah." The evidence of all the witnesses with no conflict was this: Persons in search of boisterous, animating and exhilarating juice would go to Hannah and ask where it could be found.

He always replied that he did not know, but HAD HEARD if a fellow would take a bottle of emptiness, follow a pathway about half a mile into the woods until it came to a log crossing the trail, lay the bottle on the log, half a dollar beside it, go off out of sight, go back in about thirty minutes, by some strange and magic presto veto change, hocus pocus transition unknown to him, he would find the money gone and the bottle filled with the best and purest "mountain dew" that was ever wildcatted by a moonshiner or cataracted an inebriate's gullet.

This state of affairs, to the perplexity of the uninitiated, continued some time, until Uncle Sam's curiosity was somewhat aroused, and he sent a trusted and experienced agent to see how that mysterious transformation was accomplished, and to solve, if possible, this intricate and difficult problem.

The agent worked out the example according to his arbitrary rules and found the answer to be, *marible dictu!* that Hannah was making and selling whiskey without license, and wildcat whiskey at that, and referred the case to the U. S. Court.

The case was being tried, and after his bow to the court and jury, Colonel Denson said, "Gentlemen of the jury, we have heard all our lives two important questions asked, and to neither one has a satisfactory answer ever been given. They have always been, and are still, vexatious and mooted questions. The two momentous questions, gentlemen of the jury are: 'What was the matter with Hannah?' and 'Who struck Billy Patterson?' Gentlemen of the jury, we may never be able to find out who struck Billy that fearful blow, but we are going to find out to a certainty 'what was the matter with Hannah,' so you can give a correct answer." He then rehearsed the evidence before the jury, and said:

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, is it not clear to your minds 'what was the matter with Hannah?' Hannah was selling whiskey without license, and wildcat whiskey at that. Gentlemen, when any one asks you again 'what was the matter with Hannah,' tell them Hannah was selling whiskey without license, and it 'mountain dew,' defrauding this great Government, defrauding you, gentlemen, your wives and children, out of your just and equitable rights."

Colonel Denson had Judge Bruce grinning a broad delighting smile across and o'er his face circling from ear to ear, and everybody in the room sniggering except Hannah and the moonshiner sitting beside me, and I had curiosity to know who Colonel Denson was, and I bent over, putting my hand to my mouth and asked my seat mate, "Who is the man speaking?" He replied very positively and with much vindictiveness, "It is that ar g—d d—m cussed Denson."

I did not know why he spoke so disrespectfully of Colonel Denson; I could see why Hannah was not enjoying himself as we were, but I could not see why my moonshine seat mate was so displeased. I saw he was 'sho nuff' mad 'bout somp'n 'nother," and for safety, off to another seat I moved.

The jury in the Hannah case soon returned into the court room, and said by their verdict, that they had settled at last that long discussed question, that it was true there had never been but one thing the matter with Hannah, and that was Hannah had been selling "mountain dew."

After disposition of Hannah question was had, Judge Bruce said, "Call your next case, Mr. District Attorney."

Colonel Denson picked up a package of papers, and, after drawing out one, looked at it for a moment intently, and said "If your Honor pleases, the next case is a case very similar to the one we have just tried, but unfortunately, it is against Redsnout Snollogoster, and not against Billy Patterson, for if it was against Patterson, I think we might find out who dealt Billy that violent stroke; but for the present, at least, we will have to let that vexatious question remain unanswered and still debatable. Mr. Marshal, call Redsnout Snollogoster."

The Marshal called aloud "Redsnout Snollogoster in court?" and my ex-seat mate and typical moonshiner answered

"H-e-r-2," slowly and morosely, as though the world was not rocking entirely to his notion, and futurity to him looked distinctly dismal, as though he thought were singing the dire fates like those at Troy the Trojans heard, and he was soon to be roughly driven by violent wind and tossed by trouble waves, arose and walked reluctantly inside the bar, and took his seat behind his attorney, presenting a most woeful and sorrowful figure, a face careworn and haggard, as though he realized the world, without sympathy or mercy, was about to deal him a cruel, heavy, staggering and a "most unkindest" thump and many years must intervene before he could again in freedom sniff aromatic gales happy like the mocking bird whistling in the air.

Then and there, if my mind was still a little somewhat in doubt as to who it was that struck Billy that star-seeing "jodarter," it was as clear as the noonday sun in a cloudless sky what for that mad moonshiner hit Denson that wicked lick.

* * * * *

On October 13th, 1903, long after the foregoing events transpired, when drowsy night, with her sullen wings double shaded the earth, the wild winds in their stony caves slept in calm and sinless peace, fowls in their twig nests were couched, wild, timorous beasts hungry came forth in midnight air the rough wastes and woods to prowl and roam, and hilarity and luxury coalesced and reigned supreme in the glen where poor scarce welcome are within its pales, it was ascertained beyond peradventure, to a mathematical certainty, that it was Birmingham Bob of Rainbow Glen that struck that queried blow with pugilistic violence driven, for, on that night, he, naughty boy (*widely known throughout the land concerning truth and veracity and rich because the Confederate soldier's widow is poor*), frantic, said in his famous soliloquy, that it was he who delivered to Bill that triumphant "docsologer" which shattered his teeth, disorganized his nose, mutilated his facial resemblance into disfiguration and frightful deformity, gave him a view panoramic of moon and every star spangling its brilliancy in the skies, and o'er viney dale, and dense wood ravined, floated, far out, Bill's loud, pain-proclaiming wails echoing and re-echoing on the morning breeze.

More Pork or A Nail on the Head Hard Hit.

Years ago, when the prohibition question was being cussed and discussed throughout the state of Kansas, and great and multitudinous billows of sulphurous profanity was being rolled and surged from center to uttermost bounds, a whiskey advocate was addressing an audience and began, "Ladies and Gentlemen, our great state is purely a grain growing state. We have here, no rich iron beds and coal deposits like Alabama, no cotton, cane and rice fields like Mississippi and Louisiana, but here we raise vast quantities of all kinds of grain. What would we do with all our grain if it were not for our distilleries?"

A prohibition farmer in back of audience, in intuition quickly jumped to his feet, and with a stratagem successfully confuting the emergency, interruptingly, with vehemence replied in stentorian tones of suavity void, "*Feed it to hogs. Raise more pork and less hell.*"

Caucasia Versus Negrem, or the Negro's Hard Fate.

He may at any time be killed,
The ground made red with his blood spilled.
When spring with mantle clothes with green,
His body lynched may oft' be seen.

He may be killed—killed without fear,
When Summer with its heat is here,
When Winter wraps with thick snow gown,
Or when the Autumn leaves are brown.

To tree tied at him you can look,
Chained there for him alive to cook.
His liver baked ship to earth's ends,
A keep-sake for your distant friends.

Kill him, yes you can, for fun sheer,
From New Year Day to end of year,
But, if you kill a jay or quail,
You'll pay for that or go to jail.

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